

HERD, J. M.

INTERVIEW

#12371

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Hazel B. Greene

This report made on (date) December 9, 1937

1. Name J. M. Herd
2. Post Office Address Swink, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) _____
4. DATE OF BIRTH: _____ Day _____ Year 1873
5. Place of birth Lamar County, Texas.
6. Name of Father S. D. Herd Place of birth Tennessee
Other information about father _____
7. Name of Mother Esther Whiteman Place of birth Illinois
Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____.

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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist.
December 9, 1937.

Interview with J. M. Herd
Swink, Oklahoma

I came to the Indian Territory with my parents when I was fifteen years old, in 1888, to a place two miles south of where Boswell City was built when a railroad came through there in 1901. We lived there a couple of years and farmed and raised stock. We had about a hundred head of cattle and just hogs enough for our own use. We raised a few horses. Mainly on account of poor schools Father sold out and returned to Texas. There were other inconveniences, too. We had to go ten miles to mill, away down on Red River, and that was no little task. It would easily take the whole day. The nearest store was two miles away, LeFlore's Store, but there was no post office there; we got our mail at Direct, Texas, ten miles from our home.

A man named Peter Pitts taught a three months' subscription school near us one summer. Most of the pupils were Choctaw Indian children, but they paid, too,

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just like the white children. He was an old Confederate veteran, and had lost a leg in the Civil War and this little school was his main means of livelihood and that was a poor one, because he had so few pupils and they paid only a dollar per month, each.

In 1898 I decided that I would try the Indian Territory again. My mother had a brother at Goodwater in Red River County, W. J. Whiteman. He had a store there, so there is where I went. He was postmaster, too. He was a white man but an inter-married citizen, having married Miss Maggie Harris, a daughter of Henry Harris, who was really one of the first settlers, and a very prominent man in the Choctaw Nation. I don't know whether Henry Harris was a Choctaw Indian or not but certainly his daughter Maggie was. W. J. Whiteman lived until about 1935. He is buried at Harris.

I worked in Whiteman's store for eighteen months. I slept in the store and sometimes it seemed like I would hear a thousand shots fired in the vicinity of the store in one night but I would never get up because it was nearly always drunk Indians showing off or settling some grudge with other Indians and sometimes

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they would shoot just to hear the noise of the guns firing. Sometimes next morning we would find a hat or two out not far from the store, and occasionally some blood, but we did not bother to go out unless someone was seriously wounded and needed a wound dressed. Neither did they bother us after we had closed the store for the night, unless they really needed help. Of course in emergencies we would open the store up at any hour.

I learned just enough of the Choctaw language to be able to understand what the Choctaws wished to purchase in the store. The Choctaws always made one purchase at a time, and got their change before making another purchase. If they had hides, furs, or roots to sell they would sell those things and would receive their money before making a purchase.

In those days, the Indians dug lots of snakeroot, a little ginseng and May-apple root. The men brought in some furs. Coon hides would bring 40 or 50 cents. Opossum from five to twenty cents; skunk 20 to 35 cents; mink 50 to 75 cents. Calico cost from five to eight cents per yard and they always bought ten yards to make

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a dress. Calico was only twenty-seven inches wide, so it took ten yards as they made the skirts full then. Mens good suits were priced from \$15.00 to \$18.00 each. Wagons, harness and the like were much cheaper than they are now.

It seems to me that there was a cemetery at Shawneetown. The majority of people in the Indian Territory in early days did not mark graves anyway. Some of the wealthier ones did and frequently burials took place with little or no ceremony.

For instance, one morning an Indian and I were riding the range, horse hunting, when we came upon a hog that had been shot and killed. We looked a little farther and saw the body of an Indian, who had evidently been caught killing the hog that did not belong to him, and probably by the owner of the hog, and had been dealt with as the owner thought hog thieves should be dealt with. That was the conclusion we reached. My friend rode on and got an officer of the law and a few more men and we held a sort of an inquest, scooped out a grave, rolled the dead Indian in a blanket,

and buried him right there. I have seen as many as six Indians, who were killed in a drunken brawl, buried in one long trench.

B. C. Hallum of Fort Towson owns a place down on Red River about six miles southeast of Fort Towson and, when he was excavating an approach for a ferry, at the mouth of Doaksville Creek, they dug up one skeleton. It was on the west side of the mouth of Doaksville Creek, where I have always been told that the original Doaksville was built and that there had been a cemetery there.

An old man by the name of Tally, who is now dead, told me that Paris, Texas, bought her first goods at Doaksville on Red River and Doaksville Creek where it empties into Red River. Mr. Tally has a son at Swink, who would probably bear this statement out. His name is Allen Tally.

I married a white girl in Texas, Miss Ella Wesley. We have two children. We moved to Swink, in 1910 and I have had a general merchandise store there for twenty-one years, up to a couple of years ago,

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when I sold out to my brother. I drill a few water wells now. About 1922 to 1924, I served Choctaw County as County Commissioner from this end of the County.

Swink was incorporated about twenty years ago, so that they could have a town marshal to control the more undesirable element of people. The town had to be moved from the north side of the railroad tracks to the south side, before it could be incorporated, because it was built on the land of a minor Indian, and the titles to the lots were not legal.

After I left Goodwater and before I moved to Swink, I moved to Glenco, near the Osage country, twelve miles northwest of Pawnee. The Osages and Pawnees were blanket Indians then. A blanket was the only garment that lots of them wore. The men sometimes wore buckskin breeches and moccasins, and some of them simply wore a breech clout and blanket. The most of the women went barefoot. The babies were carried on the backs of the women, in a shawl only, not even a diaper. I never heard a Pawnee or Osage

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baby cry. In rain, sunshine, sleet or snow, or whatever weather they had, they would just shut their eyes, throw back their heads and "take it" with their faces turned up to the sky.

To prevent white people from robbing and cheating Pawnee and Osage Indians, all business was done through Indian agents. If a merchant stood well with the Indian Agent he had a good business, if he did not, he had very little. The Pawnees and Osages had to get orders from their agent for every thing they wanted to buy, even small purchases. They bought fine blankets, shawls, red silk handkerchiefs, fine buggies and harness, fine saddles, silver-belled spurs, fine rings and beads. They bought nothing cheap.

I stayed in Glenco for two years.

The Pawnees, in those days, had a custom of piling the belongings of the deceased with him, on top of the ground. They would put his saddle, gun, hat, blankets on the ground and then cover all over with rocks. That was his tomb. Another Indian never violated an Indian tomb but white men did. They would steal anything from the tomb that took their fancy.

At a Fourth of July celebration I saw some Osages kill three beeves with bows and arrows; I saw them dress those three beeves and eat every bit of them, blood raw, except the horns, hooves and hides. There was nothing left, not even the intestines, neither did they wash anything. Simply emptied the intestines out there on the prairie and ate them without bread, salt or anything else. Had I not seen that I would have doubted it. They just did that for a demonstration, just to show that they could do it. They did cook the most of their food, but they cooked nothing that day. That was away back about 1894.

~~The Osages built good sized tepees out of sticks,~~
mud and grass, with holes in the tops big enough to let the smoke escape, and they cooked on fires built in the center of the tepees and ate out of the pots and pans. They slept on buffalo robes and blankets around the edge of the tepees.

I knew some Osage Indian boys and girls who were sent away to the States to school and were highly educated, especially one boy and girl, who were graduates

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from a college in Chicago, who came home, threw off the "white man clothes", donned blankets, lived, ate and slept in the tepees, in preference to the houses that they could have had. Sometimes when they would go to town they would dress up, but at home they wanted to be just blanket Indians.
